

## The Sons Of Martha

The Sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part;  
But the Sons of Martha favour their Mother of the careful soul and the troubled heart.  
And because she lost her temper once, and because she was rude to the Lord her Guest,  
Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons, world without end, reprieve, or rest.

It is their care in all the ages to take the buffet and cushion the shock.  
It is their care that the gear engages; it is their care that the switches lock.  
It is their care that the wheels run truly; it is their care to embark and entrain,  
Tally, transport, and deliver duly the Sons of Mary by land and main.

They say to mountains "Be ye removèd." They say to the lesser floods "Be dry."  
Under their rods are the rocks reprovèd — they are not afraid of that which is high.  
Then do the hill-tops shake to the summit — then is the bed of the deep laid bare,  
That the Sons of Mary may overcome it, pleasantly sleeping and unaware.

They finger Death at their gloves' end where they piece and repiece the living wires.  
He rears against the gates they tend: they feed him hungry behind their fires.  
Early at dawn, ere men see clear, they stumble into his terrible stall,  
And hale him forth like a haltered steer, and goad and turn him till evenfall.

To these from birth is Belief forbidden; from these till death is Relief afar.  
They are concerned with matters hidden — under the earthline their altars are —  
The secret fountains to follow up, waters withdrawn to restore to the mouth,  
And gather the floods as in a cup, and pour them again at a city's drouth.

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose.  
They do not preach that His Pity allows them to drop their job when they damn-well choose.  
As in the thronged and the lighted ways, so in the dark and the desert they stand,  
Wary and watchful all their days that their brethren's ways may be long in the land.

Raise ye the stone or cleave the wood to make a path more fair or flat;  
Lo, it is black already with the blood some Son of Martha spilled for that!  
Not as a ladder from earth to Heaven, not as a witness to any creed,  
But simple service simply given to his own kind in their common need.

And the Sons of Mary smile and are blessèd — they know the Angels are on their side.  
They know in them is the Grace confessèd, and for them are the Mercies multiplied.  
They sit at the feet — they hear the Word — they see how truly the Promise runs.  
They have cast their burden upon the Lord, and — the Lord He lays it on Martha's Sons!

Rudyard Kipling

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This poem refers in large part to the following passage in the Bible (Luke 10:38—42, Revised Standard Version):

- (38) Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house.
- {39} And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.
- {40} But Martha was distracted with much serving; and she went to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."
- {41} But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things;
- {42} one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

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